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THE COST OF UNDER-HIRING IN PROFESSIONAL SERVICES MARKETING

Why director-level marketing leadership is a growth requirement, not a luxury.

April 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A quiet but consequential pattern is now visible across the UK legal market. When firms want stronger growth, better cross-practice visibility, sharper positioning and a more commercial approach to marketing and business development, they often hire below the level the brief really demands.

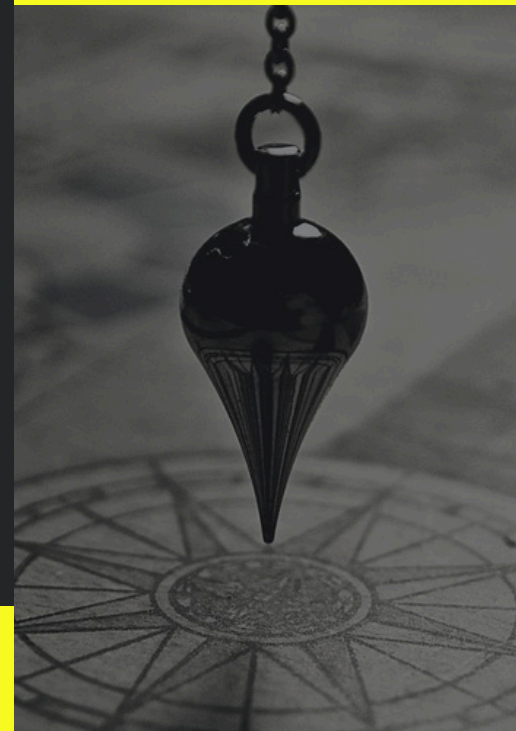
The role is called 'Head of' or 'Senior Manager'. The mandate, however, is much bigger: build a strategy, influence partners, improve cross-sell, professionalise client development, introduce measurement, protect team focus and create a more disciplined operating model. In practice, that is a director-level brief, whether the title says so or not.

This matters because law firms are not conventional corporates. In a partnership, progress depends on buy-in, judgement, governance and the ability to shift behaviour without excessive process. That is where experienced leadership pays for itself. Senior hires do not simply bring more capability. They bring pattern recognition, credibility and fewer expensive wrong turns.

The central argument of this paper is straightforward: many firms are not under-hiring because they lack ambition. They are under-hiring because they under-estimate the complexity of the role. They see the visible outputs of marketing and miss the invisible leadership work underneath it. The result is a false economy – lower salary cost in the short term, slower strategic progress and weaker commercial return over time.

AT A GLANCE

- Many firms now expect director-level growth results from roles hired, paid or positioned as delivery-led management roles.
- The problem is not the title itself. It is the mismatch between mandate, authority and capability.
- Senior marketing leadership is not simply scaled-up delivery. It is organisational change, stakeholder management, governance and commercial decision support.
- The cost of under-hiring is rarely salary. It is slower execution, weaker partner buy-in, fragmented cross-sell and unrealised revenue.



THE QUIET TREND: LEANER TITLES, BIGGER MANDATES

There is nothing inherently wrong with a 'Head of Marketing' title. Plenty of outstanding leaders operate at that level and deliver well beyond it. The issue is not the label. It is the way many firms compress the role.

Across the market, firms are trying to stay lean while also becoming more sophisticated. They want better market visibility, stronger client development, more joined-up sector campaigns, improved digital performance and clearer evidence of return.

Yet they often structure the most senior hire in a way that still assumes marketing is primarily a support function rather than part of the firm's growth infrastructure. That tension is where under-hiring happens.

The market itself already signals a meaningful difference between delivery-led management and top-of-function leadership. Anthem's 2026 Business Services Salary Survey, benchmarks Marketing Director roles at £130k-£180k, with Head of Marketing at £110k-£150k and Senior Marketing Manager at £85k-£110k.

In legal BD, it places Head of BD at £120k-£180k and Senior BD Manager at £100k-£150k, while BD Director sits at £150k-£350k^[1]. That spread is not arbitrary it is because the roles reflect a fundamentally different level of accountability.

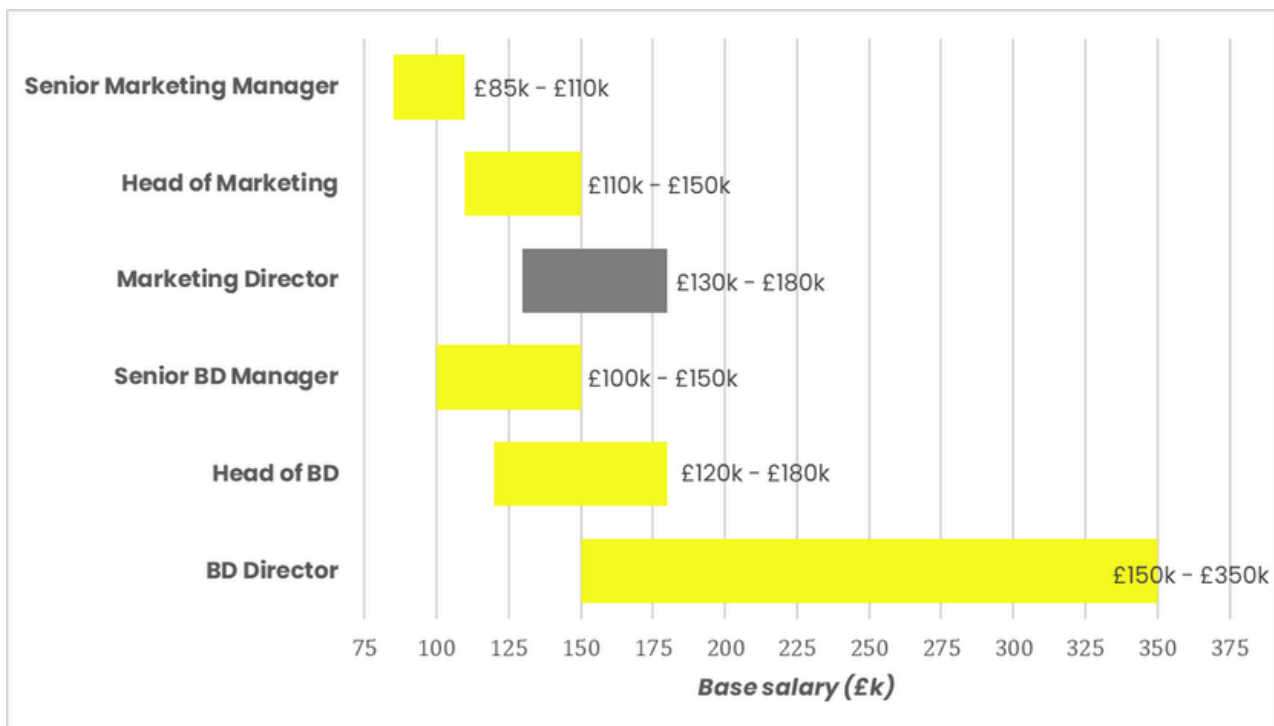


Figure 1. Indicative London salary bands for senior legal marketing and BD roles

Source: Anthem's Salary Survey 2026: Business Services, Salary Data – Marketing & Business Development tables.^[1]

WHY FIRMS UNDER-ESTIMATE THE ROLE

One reason this issue persists is that the hardest parts of senior marketing leadership are often the least visible. Partners can see the event, the pitch, the directory submission, the campaign launch and the website refresh. What they do not always see is the work that makes those outputs commercially useful.

- Setting priorities when every stakeholder request feels urgent
- Knowing what to say no to, and how to say it without damaging trust
- Translating a business plan into a workable growth agenda with real trade-offs
- Creating governance so activity becomes measurable, repeatable and easier to defend
- Building partner sponsorship and shifting behaviours practice by practice
- Protecting a small team from becoming a reactive service desk

That is why this is not simply a bigger version of delivery. It is a different job. A more junior stretch hire may well be talented enough to grow into it. But for a firm that needs transformation now, the question is not whether someone could develop into the role over time. The question is whether the business can afford the learning curve, the false starts and the slower pace of change.

This is where experience has tangible value. Senior leaders have usually seen the same failure modes before – partner requests crowding out strategic work,

CRM adoption stalling, cross-selling staying accidental, reporting remaining too weak to influence investment decisions, and teams staying busy without becoming more effective. That 'been there, done that' judgement materially reduces execution risk.

THE MATURITY GAP MOST FIRMS ARE STILL TRYING TO CLOSE

The wider operating context matters. In the IBA's 2025 law firm operations survey, only 30 per cent of respondents rated business professionals as highly efficient in supporting lawyers, while 43 per cent cited difficulty measuring impact and ROI as a challenge. These are distinct indicators, not evidence of direct causation, but taken together they suggest that many firms are still trying to build more mature business-services disciplines.^[2]

That has a direct implication for hiring. Where governance is weak, priorities are inconsistent, and measurement is patchy, the senior marketing role must do more than oversee execution. It must help design the operating rhythm of the function itself.

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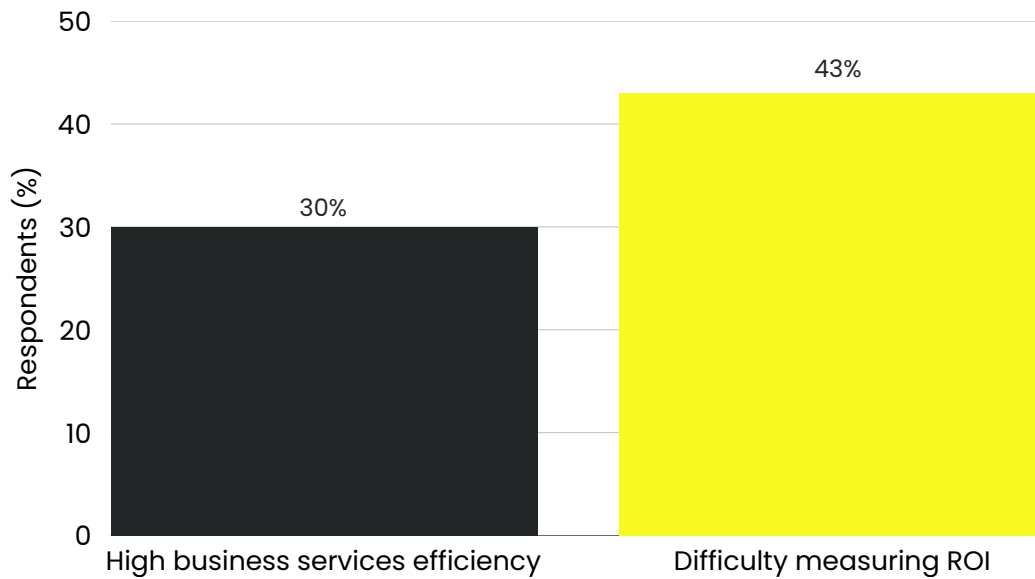


Figure 2. Selected indicators from the IBA 2025 law firm operations survey
 Source: International Bar Association, law firm operations survey, 2025 ^[2].

THE MISSED OPPORTUNITIES WHEN FIRMS HIRE TOO JUNIOR

The biggest cost of under-hiring is not weaker presentation. It is missed commercial leverage. Firms tend to lose out in four predictable areas.

'The senior marketing role must do more than oversee execution. It must help design the operating rhythm of the function.'

CLIENT GROWTH STAYS UNDER-DEVELOPED

Formal client feedback is one of the clearest evidence-backed commercial disciplines available to law firms. Thomson Reuters has reported that firms with formal client feedback programmes received 34 per cent of clients' external legal spend on average, compared with a 14 per cent baseline for firms without that structure.^[3] That finding shows a strong association between formal feedback and a stronger share of wallet, even if it does not on its own prove causation.

Yet client listening only works when someone senior enough can secure partner access, design a credible process, convert insight into action and report outcomes in a way leadership trusts. A capable manager can run a project. A seasoned director is more likely to build a repeatable programme.

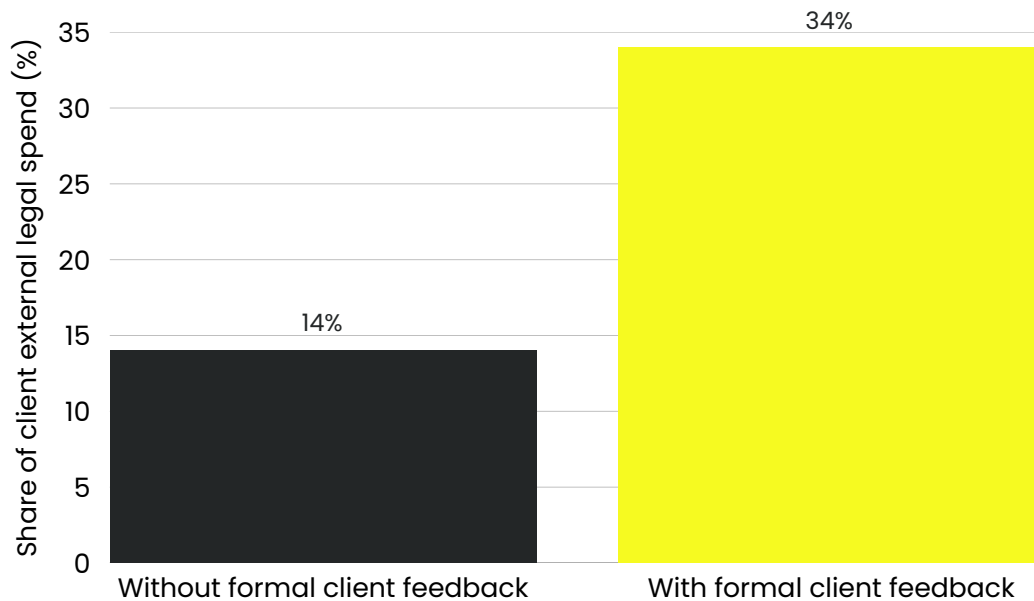


Figure 3. Client feedback and share of wallet
Source: Thomson Reuters Institute, Stellar Performance 2023^[3].

CROSS-SELL REMAINS ACCIDENTAL

Cross-practice growth is rarely unlocked by better collateral alone. It depends on internal visibility, structured client team habits, better referral behaviours and a leadership cadence that makes collaboration expected rather than optional. Without that, firms continue to leave revenue on the table simply because lawyers do not join the dots consistently.

STRATEGY BECOMES ADVISORY RATHER THAN GOVERNING

In too many firms, strategy remains something the partnership says it wants rather than the framework that governs decisions. That is a leadership problem. Harvard's Centre on the Legal Profession has been clear that law firm strategy only works when the partnership actively supports it, because implementation in a partnership is inseparable from consensus, sponsorship and political alignment ^[4].

MARKETING STAYS VULNERABLE IN BUDGET SEASON

If a team cannot demonstrate what changed, it remains easier to challenge than functions with harder financial reporting. The Law Society's guidance is explicit that business development strategy should include how success is measured, including how marketing activity results in new business enquiries ^[5]. Director-level hires are more likely to build that reporting spine.

WHAT SENIOR LEADERSHIP ADDS THAT A STRETCH HIRE OFTEN CANNOT YET BRING

This is not an anti-development argument. Strong people absolutely should be given room to grow. But there is a difference between a role that allows stretch and a role that depends on seasoned judgement from day one.

That difference is why seniority should be understood less as status and more as risk reduction.

Capability	What a stretch hire may still be learning	What an experienced senior hire usually brings
Prioritisation	How to balance delivery with strategic focus under pressure	A clear triage model, a stop-doing list and the confidence to hold the line
Partner management	How to influence without enough formal authority	Credibility with senior stakeholders and faster trust-building
Operating model design	How to improve output within existing constraints	How to redesign the system behind the output
Measurement	How to report activity well	How to build reporting that changes decisions
Change sequencing	How to start change	How to pace change so the firm adopts it rather than resists it

Senior people do not just bring more capability. They often bring fewer wrong turns, quicker diagnosis, stronger stakeholder handling and faster time to value.



THE ECONOMICS OF THE DECISION

The common internal objection is usually some version of this: 'We need someone hands-on, not overly senior.' In reality, the more resource-constrained a firm is, the more it needs someone who can sequence work intelligently, protect the team from scattergun demand and focus effort where it will move the needle fastest.

The additional salary cost for a director-level hire is real, but it is not usually the decisive number. The more relevant question is how quickly the premium can be

repaid through faster execution, better client retention, stronger cross-sell and fewer wasted months spent redesigning the role later.

Using the London legal salary bands in the Anthem guide, the midpoint gap between Head of Marketing and Marketing Director is roughly £25k on base salary alone. Even after allowing for recruitment costs and employer on-costs, the commercial threshold for covering that differential is relatively modest when set against the wider value a senior hire can bring through sharper prioritisation, stronger stakeholder management and faster time to impact. ^[1]



WHAT A BOARD SHOULD EXPECT FROM A SENIOR HIRE

If a firm hires at genuine top-of-function level, the expectation should not be simply 'more strategy'. It should be a better operating system.

What should be in place	What it changes
A prioritised annual and quarterly plan linked to firm strategy	Marketing stops being a queue of requests and becomes a decision framework
A sponsor model across practice and sector priorities	Partner engagement becomes structured and accountable
A defined triage process and visible stop-doing list	The team gains capacity for work that actually supports growth
A formal client listening programme	Client development becomes evidence-led rather than anecdotal
A basic cross-sell engine	Collaboration moves from goodwill to repeatable practice
A concise leadership scorecard	Investment discussions become more commercially grounded

SELECTED ANONYMISED CASE STUDY EXAMPLES

The argument for senior marketing leadership is not theoretical. In practice, the gains tend to appear when a function is repositioned as a commercial enabler rather than a support service. The examples below are anonymised and drawn from the author's prior leadership roles ^[6].

Context	Measured impact
International law firm brand and campaign transformation	Webinar registrations up 150%+, engagement with event content up 32%, visits to key service pages up 27%, partner uptake of campaign assets up 40%, and follow-up meetings from targeted sector activity up 20%.
International law firm digital and brand governance transformation	Website visits increased from 100k to 1.1m in one year, with multilingual engagement up 22% and stronger confidence in the marketing function through better analytics and governance.
International Professional Services marketing function redesign	LinkedIn impressions up 450% year on year, follower growth up 125%, traffic to sector pages up 280%, and overall website traffic up 41% after introducing stronger governance, sharper propositions and a more performance-led model.

IN CONCLUSION

The real issue is not whether a firm prefers the title 'Head of' or 'Director'. The real issue is whether it is serious enough about growth to hire the level of leadership that growth actually requires.

When the brief is limited to delivery, a strong manager may be entirely right. But when the role is expected to change how the firm grows – across strategy, partner engagement, cross-sell, client development, governance and ROI – the hire is no longer a delivery appointment. It is a strategic one.

That is why the cost of under-hiring is rarely visible on day one. It shows up later in slower execution, fragmented priorities, weaker internal adoption and opportunities that never quite convert. Firms often believe they are making a prudent hiring decision when they buy one level down. In reality, many are simply under-buying against the mandate they have set.

The choice, then, is not between 'Head of' and 'Director' as titles. It is between activity and leadership. Between delivery and operating model change. Between a role that helps the firm stay busy, and a role that helps it grow more deliberately.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hayley Brooksbank is a senior marketing leader and consultant with more than 25 years of experience helping Professional Services firms translate business ambition into stronger market presence and performance. Through Studio B Consulting, she advises leadership teams on brand, go-to-market effectiveness, marketing transformation and commercial alignment across legal, consultancy and B2B environments.

Let's talk: If you want to discuss what a senior marketing leader can do for your business DM 'HIRE UP' to: www.linkedin.com/in/hayleybrooksbank

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ABOUT ANTHEM.

Anthem Consulting was set up by Frosso Miltiadou and Simone Sullivan in 2013. Having spent over 30 combined years within the professional services' recruitment space, we decided to go it alone and as all entrepreneurs say, it's the best thing we ever did! Specialising in marketing and business development recruitment within professional services, we work across the legal sector from magic circle to small boutiques law firms and barristers' chambers, as well as accountancy, consulting, real estate and built environment sector.

We offer our candidates and clients a consultative approach and an honesty that they say is refreshing! If you would like to discuss your career in marketing and BD, please get in touch.



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[4] Harvard Law School Center on the Legal Profession. Preparing to steer the ship. Available at:

<https://clp.law.harvard.edu/knowledge-hub/magazine/issues/leading-strategy/preparing-to-steer-the-ship/>

[5] The Law Society. Business development for law firms. Available at: <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/en/topics/business-management/business-development-for-law-firms>

[6] Selected anonymised case study metrics drawn from the author's prior leadership roles and retained records, used here for illustrative thought leadership purposes.